

Blood Brothers

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Summary: This was something that would go on unspoken. It was one of the many dark secrets that the Bat clan kept. What could they do? What could anyone do, knowing all too well that monsters were real and living inside the people they loved the most? Rated T for implied child abuse and a nasty OOC Batman.

Blood Brothers

A/N: This takes place less than a year after Dick sets aside his role as Robin and shortly after Jason takes up the mantle, himself. The story is dreary and heavy-handed, touching on sexual abuse and the trauma it leaves behind. Nothing is mentioned in graphic detail. There is no happy ending and nothing is truly resolved. If you believe there's a chance this subject will upset you, I urge you not to read. Click away. Seriously. My fan-fic's shit and you won't be missing out on much.

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><p>"Now we're blood brothers, a part of me will always live in you. I'll love all your demons because now they're my demons, too." - Nicole Dollanganger<p>

* * *

><p>It was a chilly night in Gotham and Dick was alone with his thoughts. He resented the ice and greying slush clinging to the pavement outside his door. Dick sighed and watched as his own warm breath took shape. When he was a child, Dick had believed that each little cloud of hot breath was the definite shape of his words, that seeing sounds was a part of what made Winter so magical. He knew

better, now, and he was getting damned sick of this cold. The young man (if you could call him that at seventeen years of age) had done his best to block out the freezing wind. He had lined the cracks in the window with newspaper and he had pressed an old towel into the crease under his door. Still, he shivered in his sweatpants and pullover. It seemed that nothing would keep the cold wind out. Without any heating, the motel room offered no relief.<p>

Dick had been at this motel for several long months, despite Alfred's uneasiness. The old caretaker had begged Dick to return to the comforts of the Wayne estate, to set aside his differences with his surrogate father and put this mess behind them. Dick knew how the kind butler worried. When it was made clear that the teen had no intention of ever coming back, Alfred pleaded with him to at least ask Bruce for the money to rent himself a flat. There was no doubt in Dick's mind that the billionaire would supply it, if only he could bring himself to ask. Even after throwing his gaudy old costume at the dark knight's feet all those months ago, storming out of the Wayne estate to make a name for himself someplace else - Maybe Bludhaven, once he'd finished his studies - He knew that financial security was the one thing Bruce wouldn't deny him.

Money was never a problem for Gotham's prized billionaire. The teen gnawed his lip, mulling over this thought. He'd rather not ask for favours. This left Dick to remain in the same run-down motel room, meant to be temporary all those months ago. Dick's back was pressed against an old stained mattress as he sat cross-legged on the floor, watching the last of his sugared corn puffs go soggy in the milk. He stirred lazily, then poured a spoonful of liquid onto one lone corn puff floating to the side, effectively drowning it in the sugar-enriched stew. The boy sighed. There were no chairs. No table. The disgusting bed and mattress were the only comfort this little room had to offer. He ignored the broken television set that stared him down from its corner. Perhaps the owner wouldn't mind if he converted it into a coffee table. He'd grown tired of eating his meals on the floor.

There was an open-palmed bang at the screen door, pulling the teen loose from his thoughts. It was followed by the thud of a steel-toed boot. Dick set the bowl down and scrambled to his feet. Was it the motel manager? He wasn't due payment until morning... Whomever it was, Grayson hoped they hadn't yet made a dent. Kicking aside the old worn towel, he unhooked the latch and yanked the door inward, revealing a disheveled looking Jason Todd beating the crap out of the screen door that separated them. "Jason! What the Hell-"

The kid just kept going, belting out punches and booting the screen until it bent under his force.

Dick called out for him to stop, to step back so that he could at least get the damned thing open, but the boy wouldn't let up. Finally, the young Grayson had to shove the screen open with the weight of his shoulder and Jason was sent stumbling backwards from the blow. The younger boy slipped. He fell hard onto his bottom, grey slush spraying everywhere from the fall. Dick was about to tear into him for being so careless, for destroying another person's property that the teenager would no doubt have to pay for, but one look at Jason's shivering form made him falter. Dick took in the sight of him. The boy was dressed in nothing but a paper thin tank top, boots, and jeans. He was wet, shivering, and sitting in the slush wasn't

about to do him any favours.

The last of the Grayson family wasted no time gathering the boy up in his arms. He brought the trembling child inside, sat him down on the soiled mattress, then pulled the blankets up and around his frame. Jason seemed smaller, somehow. His body was thin and almost hollow in appearance. When the older boy had carried him inside, he felt as delicate as an armful of tiny bird bones wrapped in felt. With Jason's baby blue eyes glazed over and his cheeks beet red from the cold, any anger that Dick had left merely faded away, just like his breath in the cold. Something felt wrong and yet terribly familiar. He could see a little of himself in this kid's face. Of course, they had the eyes and hair to match. The boy was only twelve years old, but given another five years, Dick was sure it'd be like looking into an angry, somewhat steely reflection of himself.

Dick watched as the boy collected himself, those striking eyes they shared darting around the barren room, then pausing to take note of a ragged lone bed spring spiraling out of the mattress. Grayson swallowed. The colour rushed to his cheeks and the struggling teen couldn't help but feel ashamed of the mess his life had become. While his location was no secret, Jason was now the first to be allowed entrance to his would-be home. It was for this reason exactly: Dick was embarrassed. "I'm, uh... Sorry about the mess..." He said this, looking away, as if there was anything there to even make a mess with...

The boy shook his head. "Nah, man" he rasped. "It's real, ah, homey in here." The words fell flatly onto the tiled floor. Neither one believed this. A moment of silence passed between them and the boys looked anywhere but at one another. It wasn't as if they had known each other for long. It'd been three short months since the new Robin had taken his place, although Dick tried not to think of it that way. It'd been less than a year since he'd left the Wayne manor. To see his guardian with a new protégé had made the teen feel strange... It dug up some conflicting emotions - Things he'd rather not try to make sense of.

"So, hey. Uhm." Jason was the first to break the silence. "Thanks for having me over."

Dick tried not to roll his eyes at that. It wasn't as if the kid gave him much of a choice. "Sure, but tell me, Jay." He gestured to the room surrounding. "What brings you to la casa o' Grayson? Gotham's high life got you down?" He winced as the words left his lips. He felt awkward. Dick had fumbled for the right thing to say and the right thing hadn't been that. Humor was how he coped, but he wanted to kick himself right about now.

Jason ran a shaky hand through his hair. "I just needed to get away."

"You mean, 'get away from Bruce'."

The boy flinched. His eyes darted away from the teen that stood before him. He opened his mouth to speak, but then thought better of it.

Dick furrowed his brow. Something was wrong. He could see it once more - That terrible familiarity between them. "Hey, c'mon. Talk to

me, Jay. What's going on?"

Something snapped inside the boy and his frame began to quake. It wasn't from the cold. Jason raised his tiny fists free from the blanket and they trembled at his sides. He bit down onto his lower lip, stifling whatever was inside him. Some dark truth was fighting to come out. Dick thought he looked furious as ever, but there was something else there, too. The boy seemed almost afraid. Grayson spoke in a subdued whisper. He almost didn't want to ask. "Hey, Jason? Can you tell me what happened? Can you tell me - Uhm." He paused, searching for the right words to continue. "Did Bruce hurt you?"

The word sounded almost too soft for the implication. It felt like something delicate in his mouth, as if a bob of cotton swab had caught in his throat. Its meaning hung tightly now, suspended in the air. Dick thought of high wires and somersaults. He thought of Haley's Circus, popcorn, and the cotton candy that his mother only let him taste on very special occasions. These willed visions of the past were sweeter, kinder than the memories he'd tried to bury deep inside himself. Now, those memories were climbing out of their shallow graves and his stomach twisted in knots.

How quickly the teen had come to that. It must have been written all over the boy's face. If it'd happened to him, Jason wondered, 'could Dick have gone through the same?' He blanched at the thought. They were dirtied by the same monster and it wore Bruce's smiling face. Jason didn't know what to say to that. It only upset him more. He rubbed furiously at his eyes, willing the tears away. He felt humiliated as it was without the faucets inside him going off. 'Robin doesn't cry.' He swallowed. "You know what he's like." It took whatever courage the boy had left to meet the teenager's gaze. It felt as if ice, cold and heavy, was building in the pit of his stomach. "You know what he's like and you just... You just let him take me in?"

"I had hoped it'd be different for you."

"Well, it ain't." Jason spat. "He gave me a home! He gave me a purpose! I thought that everything was gonna be okay, that I was gonna be okay!" His breathing hitched. Choking back a sob, he continued. "I loved him. I still love him and he- He hurt me real bad..." Dick moved beside him. He held the boy close as his crying turned to long and mournful wails. "How does he go and hurt the kids he promised to protect, huh? How's he go and do that, Dick? Tell me!"

The teen didn't have these answers. It's something he tried not to think about.

"You know what he did to me! You know what he- What he did to you!" Jason was shouting now. Anger, humiliation, heartbreak; it mingled in his cries. the boy was getting louder, bound to shout himself sore until his shrill little voice gave out. Dick wondered if he should quiet the child. He could imagine the tabloids blowing up, just as they did the first months he'd been taken in, himself. It was one more scandal that Bruce could afford to pay off. It was one more scandal that the people of Gotham would take with a grain of salt. They always did. Money had made the bachelor billionaire something of a celebrity. People would gossip over his latest escapades overseas

and delight over his charity work, then beg the media for more. 'Ooh, what a character', they'd say. 'What a national treasure'. Dick learned quickly in his youth of how cash could make the opinions of the media sway...

When the teen gazed down at the child beside him, he saw the spitting image of himself those few years ago and he hoped that someone would overhear. He hoped that someone - Anyone - Would believe it and know this to be their truth. Dick had many regrets, but when he held the younger boy close and let him scream out every misery he'd endured in his short life, he couldn't help but blame himself. Grayson felt that he'd let this happen. He was as much to blame as Bruce. The young teen should have known. He should have fought the man on Jason's adoption, but what would that have meant for the child? Would Jason have remained out there on the cold streets of Gotham? Would he have been lost in the system, fostered somewhere even worse? The kid was twelve years old, had been training alongside Batman for only a few short months, and he'd already been through Hell. At this point, Dick didn't know how else to help the boy but to let him scream it out.

They spent much of the following hours like that, sitting at the edge of the mattress, huddled in each others' arms. Once Jason had cried himself out, they spoke in ragged whispers. They talked about Bruce, what a father's love should be like, and what their lives had been before Robin had grown to be a part of them. Dick confessed that he'd grown to hate Robin as an identity. "It's what my mother used to call me. What happened to my parents was... I-It just wasn't right. Batman gave me the chance to do something about it and I'll always be grateful, but I became Robin for them, not Batman. He took Robin and made it into something I just couldn't stand to be anymore."

Jason didn't know what to say to that. Being Robin gave the boy a sense of purpose. He couldn't imagine walking away from that, let alone the man whom had shown him more kindness than anyone else ever had. Of course, they both loved Bruce and the guardian he could be, but those moments after a long night as the bat, when the mask was off and the monster came out, leading them up into his quarters to... To... 'Just let me hold you for a while.' Jason hated that part of him more than any criminal he had faced yet. The boy made a promise to himself. He would make Robin something great again - For himself, for Batman, for Dick and his mother's memory. Somehow, some way, Robin would make this right. "Can I tell you a secret?" Jason breathed. His voice still hoarse from crying.

"Yeah. 'Course you can."

"I'd like to be normal." He sighed. "I'd like to be a normal family and I'd trade away everything, if it meant we could be just that."

The young teen knew that feeling well. Dick mulled over these words for a moment, rubbing circles into Jason's back. He'd been doing so for the past hour. Finally, he reached for the forgotten bowl of cereal and stood up stiffly. "I'll be just a minute." The tired teen shuffled into the would-be bathroom, had the door still been on its hinges. Jason scoffed at him, his words tagging behind. "If you had to take a whiz, Dick, you coulda' just said so." He kept his gaze aimed straight ahead to give the older boy some privacy.

Grayson said nothing.

Jason could hear him clattering around in a the medicine cabinet. Something shattered against the floor. Dick cursed. The younger boy called out, "You okay in there?", but a few stray moments passed in silence. Jason was becoming a little concerned for his companion, until the teen came shambling out with a roll of gauze and a jagged piece of what remained of the ceramic bowl. He squatted before the younger boy, placing the gauze beside him. Dick then put his free hand out, palm up.

Jason stared.

"Hand, please."

The boy hesitated for a moment, before rolling his baby blue eyes and giving Dick his hand. The teen gripped it firmly. He then took the shard and pressed a jagged edge into Jason's palm. He caught the child's eye and warned him. "This might sting a bit." The boy merely nodded, feeling numb and much too tired to argue. As far as he was concerned right now, a cut was nothing. The teen was welcome to do as he pleased. Dick let the shard break skin. They watched, together, as a bead of blood welled up in the middle of the younger boy's palm. He released him and Jason was about to lick it off, but Dick stopped him.

"Just hang on a moment, okay?" The teenager then brought the shard to his own palm and made a shallow cut to match. He grinned, then reached for the twelve-year-old's hand once more. Jason could feel their cuts press together as the older boy gripped his hand, giving it a shake in mock greeting. Their eyes met. "Now we're blood brothers", Dick breathed. "A part of me will always live in you. I'll love all your demons because-" He swallowed. "Because they're my demons, too."

Jason felt more tears itching to come out, but it was different now. He couldn't help but laugh. It burst free from inside the boy, bubbling up his throat.

Dick joined in, releasing his sticky hand.

The boy gave him a playful shove. "Where did you come up with that, huh? What was that, anyway?" He said this with a smile.

Dick smiled, too. The teen shrugged. "It's called a blood oath." He then used his sleeve to wipe Jason's face clean. "No more tears, little brother... I mean it, okay? We're brothers, now - A real family. We may not be a normal one, 'cause there's nothing picture perfect about this, but I'm going to be here for you. You'll always have a place with me."

Jason didn't know what to say to that, but he believed him. He knew this to be true.

The young boy sat still as his brother bandaged up their hands; first Jason's and then his own. The child wasn't sure how long they'd been sitting on the edge of the mattress, but they did so in silence, watching as the gauze turned red, just happy to be in each others' presence. This was something that would go on unspoken. It was one of the many dark secrets that the Bat clan kept. What could they do?

What could anyone do, knowing all too well that monsters were real and living inside the people they loved the most? The boys held each other close. They were survivors, through and through. Blood brothers, the both of them.

End
file.